

**Belgin Turan Özkaya**

## **Realism and Autonomous Architecture: Irreconcilable Differences?**

“Giovane studenti attraverso le smisurate strade di Mosca, questa realtà mi sembrava incredibile... L’Architettura provocatoria, incredibile e dolce al tempo delle stazioni della metropolitana e dell’università sulle colline di Lenin.” This is how Aldo Rossi explains his encounter with Socialist Realism during his 1954 trip to the Soviet Union in a typescript now kept at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. This and other material on realism which make part of the Aldo Rossi papers at the Getty reveal an early influence on him which has been curiously overlooked in his later reception among the discussions of neo-Rationalism, autonomous architecture and post-modernism. In Italy in the fifties during Rossi’s formative years, there was an ongoing debate on realism the parameters of which extended from Italian neo-Realist film and literature to the writings of Georg Lukács and Socialist Realism which, I argue, might explain some of his later formulations, particularly his infamous deviation from orthodox avant-garde/modernist trajectory. What is interesting is Rossi has also come to be seen as the major proponent of architectural autonomy, as someone who has paved the way for architectural “formalism” and aestheticism. Traditionally, as is very well known realist art (particularly Socialist Realism) and artistic autonomy, as a precondition of the avant-garde, have been seen as utterly inimical.

In this paper I will look at the categories of realism and artistic autonomy vis-à-vis the work of Aldo Rossi and the changing Italian conjuncture. Are there ways of reconciling an engagé position with a defense of artistic autonomy? In addition to the realism debates of the fifties, how did the politically-charged atmosphere of the sixties affect Rossi? How did Rossi react to the then very potent Italian Student Movement with which he has been seen as accomplice? Raising questions of social engagement in relation to someone who has been seen as the champion of autonomous architecture, I would argue, will show the unexpected ways within which these categories work.

### **Short Biography**

#### Degrees

(1995) Ph.D. in History of Architecture and Urbanism, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY (dissertation: *Production of a Discourse: Italian “Neo-Rationalism” as Case Study*).

(1988) MS. in Restoration, Middle East Technical University, Ankara (thesis: *Evaluation of Interventions for the Conservation of an Archaeological Site? Ostia Antica*).

(1985-1986) Non-degree training in Scuola di Perfezionamento per lo Studio ed il Restauro dei Monumenti, Università di Roma, La Sapienza, Rome. Thesis research on *Ostia Antica*.

(1984) B.Arch., Middle East Technical University, Ankara (ranked fourth).

## Experience

Currently teaching History and Theory of Architecture and Historiography at the Faculty of Architecture, Middle East Technical University. Consultant to the architectural firm PROMET in Ankara.

Courses taught in English:

*Issues and Problems in Modernism*

*Architecture and Politics in Twentieth-Century Italy*

*Theories of History I: Althusser, Jameson and the Annales School*

*Theories of History II: Visuality, Spatiality and Materiality*

*Research Methods*

*Aesthetics and the Psyche*

Contributed to survey courses in sessions on the Renaissance, Baroque and Twentieth Century.

(Winter 2001) Guest critic at second year architectural review, School of Architecture, McGill University, Montréal (Project: Reading apparatus for a Nordic City).

(Fall 2000-Winter 2001) Visiting Scholar at the Canadian Centre for Architecture ,Montréal.

(Fall 1999) Studio critic in fourth year Architectural Design Studio, Middle East Technical University (Project: Natural History Museum in Ankara).

(Fall 1992) Teaching assistant, History of Architecture and Urbanism Program, Cornell University.

(Spring 1991) Project for a Summer House on the Aegean coast (with Y.Özkaya).

(1987-1989) Research assistant, Architectural History and Theory Program, Middle East Technical University.

## Grants and Awards

(January 2001) Library Research Grant, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

(2000-2001) Visiting Scholar, Canadian Center for Architecture, Montréal, Canada.

(1999-2000) High Academic Achievement Award, Middle East Technical University, Ankara.

(Fall 1999) Eidlitz fellowship, Cornell University. Research on Aldo Rossi in Italy.

(Fall 1999) Italian government research grant. Research on Aldo Rossi in Italy.